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The BIG: A Collaborative Librarian Group

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The BIG – A Collaborative Librarian Group

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ABSTRACT

In order to manage the exponential growth of molecular and genetic information in the biomedical, clinical and public health disciplines, and expand partnerships with scientists and systems developers, a bioinformaticist-led Bioinformatics Interest Group (BIG) was created as a collaboration between two campus libraries. The BIG bridges the multi-disciplinary nature of current health sciences research by tapping into its librarian members' expert knowledge in the subjects of biology, human genetics, chemistry, engineering, and computer science and by targeting services and resources for researchers in the interdisciplinary Life Sciences Institute and participants in the university's Clinical and Translational Science Award. This group worked collaboratively with scientists and developers to expand awareness and use of bioinformatics tools and resources.

BACKGROUND

In early 2007, a University of Michigan pilot through the collaboration between the Health Sciences Libraries (HSL) and the National Center for Integrative Biomedical Informatics (NCIBI) was established to determine the viability of a bioinformaticist position to increase the quality and breadth of research support for the basic sciences and informatics at the university. Bioinformaticists are "information specialists who have received graduate training and practical experience that provides them with disciplinary background in biomedical, behavioral or biological sciences and information sciences/informatics" as defined by the National Library of Medicine (NLM).¹ This pilot resulted in the continuation of support by NCIBI to fund the bioinformaticist position.

¹NLM Individual Fellowship for Informationist Training (F37) (PAR 06-509).
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-06-509.html>

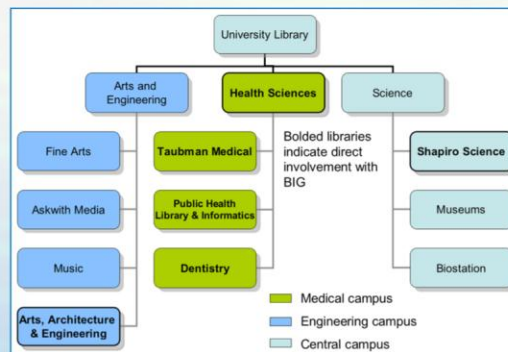
CHALLENGES

The challenges of supporting bioinformatics research can be summarized as follows:

- Multi-disciplinary nature of research
- Historical compartmentalization of library services
- Geographic separation of libraries and campuses

Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the field of bioinformatics, the bioinformaticist found it difficult to fully support the needs of researchers and developers. Resources in the engineering, biology and chemistry sciences as well as the health sciences needed to be used. The historical compartmentalization of library services as well as physical geographic separation of libraries at the university made accessing subject area librarians in those fields and combining resources for researchers very difficult.

SUBSET OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



BIOINFORMATICS INTEREST GROUP-BIG

One of the recommendations made by the bioinformaticist during the pilot phase of the position was to create a Bioinformatics Interest Group of librarians to better support bioinformatics on campus. When the bioinformaticist position was secured, the recommendation was fully supported by the directors of the Health Sciences Libraries and the Science and Art, Architecture and Engineering Libraries. In November 2007, the BIG held its kick-off meeting with the following participating library roles:

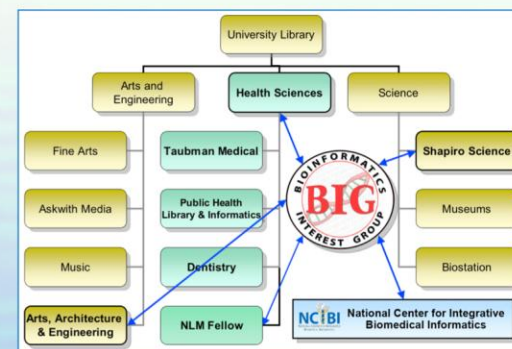
- Director, Health Sciences Libraries
- Director, Science and Art, Architecture and Engineering Libraries
- Astronomy librarian, former Art, Architecture and Engineering library associate
- Bioinformaticist
- Biological Sciences librarian
- Chemistry librarian
- Health Sciences Libraries reference associate
- Human Genetics librarian
- National Library of Medicine fellow

Each of the members brings unique skills to the group. Subject expertise in their areas is reflected in subject specific undergraduate, master's and doctoral level degrees or experience such as dual appointments in the library system as well as the medical school genetics department.

BIG'S MISSION

To provide innovative resources to support bioinformatics research on campus

BIG ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



ACTIVITIES

The BIG meets once a month, alternating between the medical and central campuses. Each meeting has an informational session dedicated to a topic in bioinformatics so that members may have an opportunity to learn about current or important issues in bioinformatics. Examples of these informational sessions include microarrays, transgenic mouse breeding, and the structure of the National Center for Integrative Biomedical Informatics. The group is active in projects such as:

- NIH Public Access Policy compliance and institutional repository pilot
- NCBI User Services training alternatives development
- Needs assessment for web portal development
- Bioinformatics resources curriculum development

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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